

REPORT ON LOCAL ELECTIONS IN GEORGIA

Eastern Europe Studies Centre (Vilnius, Lithuania)

ZUGDIDI
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Eastern Europe Studies Centre (EESC) has been registered by a Decree No 285 of the Georgian Central Election Commission on 18 May, 2010 as an international observer organisation. EESC has organised Lithuanian Election Observation Missions during Georgian Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in 2008 having 100 Lithuanian observers each, which allows for empirically based comparisons. This year 15 representatives of Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian and Belarusian nongovernmental organisations were deployed to 4 regions of Georgia: Samegrelo Zemo-Svaneti (Zugdidi, Mestia), Shida Kartli (Khashuri), Kvemo-Kartli (Marneuli) and Samtskhe-Javakheti (Adigeni, Akhaltsikhe, Aspindza, Akhalkalaki).

The main objective of the short-term EESC observation mission at the Georgian Local election has been to observe the election, to undertake an analysis of the election process and to provide its assessment. The final report of the EESC presents the observations and evaluation of the Election Day.

The report is based on findings which were collected using formalized questionnaire and which has been filled in by every EESC observers' team. All EESC observers were divided into teams and allocated to polling stations. Observers have been present in 36 polling stations in 6 election districts during all of the Election Day.

The EESC observers assessed the opening of polling stations, the voting process, the closing of polling stations and the counting of votes. 100% of the observers evaluated the opening of polling stations as good or very good. 77% stated that the voting process was good or very good. 77% evaluated the closing and the counting of votes as good or very good. Activity of the voters was rather high though inconsistent. At the end of the Election Day overall average turnout was 47% (with the dispersion from 22% to 70% in different polling stations).

According to the reports from polling stations, the voting process can be evaluated as essentially consistent with the main principles of democratic and free elections. Polling took place in a peaceful atmosphere and within well-organised election framework. The EESC observers have not reported any serious violations although few shortcomings have been noted.

Georgian election legislation provided favourable conditions for domestic and international observation. Observers' reports did not highlight any significant problems in the exercise of their functions.

The observers of the EESC have reported that in all polling stations at least one independent observer was present. In the polling stations EESC observers worked together with the other observers from national and international organisations.

Positive aspects of the election process included:

- Agitation material in polling stations during the Election Day has been present only in rarely isolated cases (1 out of 36) which is an obvious improvement in comparison with previous elections;
- The election environment/atmosphere during the Election Day has significantly improved since Presidential and Parliamentary Election in 2008;
- The progress in the knowledge of election procedures in the precinct election commissions should be also emphasized;
- Counting of the votes has been conducted in a transparent way, which ensured the smooth process.

Some breaches of the election process included:

- Technical problems with marking procedure in several polling stations were observed as ink detectors have not been functioning properly;
- Some insignificant number of family voting or voting in groups have occurred especially in rural areas (2 out of 36 polling stations), although such cases have decreased to an absolute minimum in comparison with the previous elections;
- Instructions for the voters were not visible in 2 out of 36 polling stations.

Some specific remarks on voting process can be made:

- Both main and the mobile ballot boxes were not properly sealed in Mestia. The CEC representative has responded to that problem relevantly quickly;
- There were cases in Mestia when voters were allowed to vote without producing all documents required for identifications;
- Several cases of experience and proficiency inadequacies of precinct election commissions in Mestia were observed.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

- The overall observations made by the EESC representatives allow to evaluate Georgian Local election being in accordance with the principles of democratic, free and fair elections and organised with a general respect for fundamental rights;
- Significant improvement in proficiency of the precinct election commissions should be emphasized, however specially tailored training programmes for distant precinct election commissions (e.g. Mestia) are recommended;
- Political actors and interested parties are advised to consider introducing mechanisms ensuring a balanced and consistent turnout of voters for elections.

Eastern Europe Studies Centre (Lithuania)

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